COUNCIL OF
ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

CONSEIL DES
UNIVERSITÉS DE L'ONTARIO

COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

April 2008

This newsletter provides quick updates on issues of interest to members and affiliates of COU. This issue covers the period of winter 2007-2008.

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Ontario Budget boosts knowledge infrastructure

The provincial budget of March 25 brought welcome news for Ontario universities. The budget focused on infrastructure, innovation and skills, confirming Premier McGuinty's statement that "investing in the skills and education of our people" is the "top priority" of his government.

The government provided a number of significant investments to boost the knowledge infrastructure of our universities, notably: a $200 million injection for campus renewal; $250 million over five years for research infrastructure, providing matching funds for awards from the Canada Foundation for Innovation; and funding for specific capital and research projects in addition to other initiatives, as noted in the summary below.

The budget also provided funding for a number of smaller, innovative pieces as well, particularly a 10-year tax break for new companies using innovations generated by universities, support for a research internship program and some modest support for attracting international graduate students.

These investments come on top of the remarkable capital and campus renewal investments over the last few months. The budget commitment on campus renewal, together with the January announcement of $135 million, brings the total to $335 million in one-time, end-of-year funding for deferred maintenance, a 12-fold increase over the annual contribution of $26.7 million through the Facilities Renewal Program.

All told, the deferred maintenance, capital infrastructure announcements and funding from the Ministry of Research and Innovation (MRI) total well over $1 billion to universities since the end of January. COU feels that Ministers Milloy and Wilkinson have been committed and effective champions on our behalf, and they have been well supported by Minister Duncan and the Premier.

Ontario universities of course face escalating costs that are not matched as yet by increases in operating grants. COU will continue its efforts to work with government over the coming period to develop a comprehensive funding plan that addresses operating, capital and quality issues, as well as graduate needs.

"The budget focus on skills, research and higher education is good news," said COU President Paul Genest. "Ontario needs more educated, engaged citizens to strengthen social cohesion and to provide the knowledge workers to fuel sustainable economic growth through innovation and new business creation. We look forward to working with government to prepare for continued growth and enhanced quality in our universities."

SUMMARY OF BUDGET INITIATIVES THAT IMPACT UNIVERSITIES:

Capital

- $200 million in 2007-08 for maintenance and renewal of university facilities.
- $25 million in 2007-08 for a new Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto.

New Executive Heads on board in 2008-09!

The presidential search is over for two universities – Carleton University and the University of Windsor.

ROSEANN O'REILLY RUNTE, currently President of Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, will take office as Carleton University's President and Vice-Chancellor on July 1, 2008.

ALAN WILDEMAN, currently Vice-President of Research at the University of Guelph, will assume the role of University of Windsor's President and Vice-Chancellor, also on July 1, 2008.

The next issue of *COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS* will feature articles on both.

- $10 million in 2007-08 for the University of Waterloo's new digital media institute and convergence centre at the Stratford campus.
- $9 million in 2007-08 for a research and innovation laboratory in interactive design at the Ontario College of Art & Design (OCAD).
- $464 million included in the 2007 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review for campus renewal and strategic capital investments at colleges and universities, of which $135 million was directed to facilities renewal projects at universities and $264 million to capital projects at various universities.

Research

- $250 million over five years for MRI's Ontario Research Fund for investment in research infrastructure [to provide matching funds for awards from the Canada Foundation for Innovation].
- $56 million in 2007-08 to the University of Guelph to support food/health research and the Ontario Veterinary College.
- $7.5 million for interdisciplinary research into chemicals and fuels made from agricultural resources at The University of Western Ontario.

Student Access, Student Excellence

- $385 million over three years for an annual Textbook and Technology Grant for full-time college and university students ($85 million in 2008-09 or $150 per full-time student; $130 million in 2009-10 or $225 per full-time student; $170 million in 2010-11 or $300 per full-time student).
- $27 million over three years for a Distance Grant for transportation costs for students from rural and remote areas attending college or university.
- Over $7 million over three years for an International Ontario Strategy to attract talented postsecondary students from around the world – includes a doctoral scholarship program for international students.
- Over $1 million over three years for Global Edge, to provide postsecondary students with international work placements to discover the opportunities and challenges in the international marketplace.
- Almost $17 million in 2007-08 for ACCELERATE, an initiative of MITACS (Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems) and other business partners to establish a new research internship program to place promising graduate students in the private sector (providing 250 fellowships and growing to 550 by the third year).

Other

- $56 million over four years for the Pick Ontario Freshness strategy and the Ontario Farmers' Markets initiative.
- $12.5 million in 2007-08 to support the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre.
- A 10-year tax exemption for new corporations that commercialize intellectual property developed by Canadian universities, colleges or research institutes.

Good news for Ontario universities – enrolment numbers climbing steadily for a decade

University enrolments in Ontario have been building steadily for a decade, even before the period of applications arising from the double cohort of students. As of April 3, 2008, the number of secondary school students applying to Ontario universities for fall 2008 soared to 84,266, up 4.1% compared to 80,983 applicants last year for the same time period, continuing a pattern of year-over-year increases.

As of the preliminary January 11th application deadline, 83,381 secondary school students had applied to Ontario universities compared to 79,568 the previous year, a 4.8% increase but a significant addition of 38.6% since 2001, when there were 60,164

secondary school applicants. Since students apply to more than one university, total university applications in fact reached 368,749 applications in January – a 5.1% increase when compared to 350,759 in 2007 for the same time period.

Increased funding from the Ontario government's Reaching Higher plan in 2005 – which has made university education more accessible for a greater number of students – has helped to drive the demand for a university education. So has the growing recognition that more jobs in the knowledge economy will require a university education; in fact some estimates state that 70% of jobs will require a degree in future.

Graduate programs at Ontario universities: more streamlined appraisal process in the works

In 2008, the appraisal process for Ontario graduate programs will migrate to a more self-regulatory, streamlined approach that mirrors the quality-assurance process used by other jurisdictions worldwide for their graduate programs. It will also harmonize with the appraisal process that Ontario universities use for their undergraduate programs. The Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (OCGS), an affiliate of COU, oversees the quality appraisal of all proposed master's and doctoral programs and, on a seven-year cycle, all existing graduate programs.

The new approach will see the appraisals process for ongoing graduate programs fall under the jurisdiction of the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), the same body that oversees the province's undergraduate program appraisal process. And as with undergraduate appraisals, it is the individual institutions that will shoulder the primary responsibility for quality assurance in their ongoing programs, subject to periodic audits under OCAV's direction, which would weigh institutional quality assurance methods against agreed-upon guidelines applicable to all universities. New graduate programs would still be appraised using the existing OCGS model that uses external consultants.

John ApSimon, Interim Executive Director of OCGS, said, "This approach will bring a level of conformity to quality assurance methods for both undergraduate and graduate programs in Ontario universities. The challenge is to maintain the rigour and the credibility associated with the existing OCGS appraisal process as we move forward."

Last year, COU commissioned a review of OCGS. The findings of the six-month review, led by Richard Van Loon, former Chair of Council and former President of Carleton University, were detailed in a report that was submitted in November 2007. A number of recommendations were proposed, and in February 2008 Executive Heads of Ontario universities approved a plan to move forward on several of these recommendations.

To achieve a seamless transition from one practice to another, COU established the Quality Assurance Transition/Implementation Task Force, and its Nominations Committee reviewed a slate of candidates and selected the following to serve on the Task Force:

- *Representing OCAV:* Neil Gold, University of Windsor, Chair; Susan Silverton, Laurentian University; and Fred Longstaffe, University of Western Ontario;
- *Representing OCGS:* Marilyn Rose, Brock University; and Douglas Peers, York University;
- *Representing Academic Colleagues:* Antoni Lewkowicz, University of Ottawa; and Dan Lang, University of Toronto; and
- Richard Barham, Professor Emeritus, University of Guelph, a quality expert.

The Task Force, which will consult informally with the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, will begin its work in April, pending ministry approval of the proposed approach.

High ratings for Ontario universities in first Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey

Ontario universities received high marks from the first-ever Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS) that assesses the views and experiences of their students. A large group of Ontario universities participated in the 2007 survey, which covered areas such as satisfaction with the program, the faculty and the institution chosen; support received for professional skills development; quality of the research experience; financial status; and quality of student and social life.

The key findings of the survey are:

- 76% would either definitely or probably recommend their university to someone considering their program.
- 71% would either definitely or probably select the same university if they were to start their studies again.
- 96% gave a high rating (defined as excellent, very good or good) to the intellectual quality of their faculty.
- 90% either strongly agreed or agreed that their thesis/dissertation advisor performed their role well (for programs including a thesis or dissertation).
- 86% gave a high rating (defined as excellent, very good or good) to the overall experience at their university.
- 89% rated the quality of their academic experience as high.
- 86% gave a high rating to their graduate/professional program.
- 80% felt their ability to conduct independent research was high.
- 78% awarded a high rating to their student life experience.

Some items that received poor ratings from over 10% of respondents included student office space, career services, professional skills development and the financial aid office.

About 40,000 master's and doctoral students received the questionnaire, and 42% responded. Of the respondents, 62% were in master's programs with the remaining pursuing doctoral studies; 88% were full-time students; and 55% were women. The academic fields with the most student responses were social sciences (19.8%), engineering (16.2%), health sciences (13.8%), humanities (11.2%) and business management (9.9%).

Ontario's medical schools: using innovative methods to teach tomorrow's doctors

Ontario's medical schools are exploring innovative, collaborative ways to train our province's future doctors. Collaboration in the use of technology is one focus of e-COFM – an affiliate of COU and a subcommittee of the Undergraduate Education Council of Ontario Faculties of Medicine (UE: COFM) – including the sharing of electronic cases using virtual patients as an aspect of medical training. This mode of medical education allows students to experience clinical situations in a controlled environment, especially important since there are not enough clinical placements for every learner.

The challenge is that creating good virtual patient e-cases requires a commitment of expertise, time and resources. And because there are benefits of sharing cases among medical schools, ideal virtual cases are those that have been authored to reach the broadest possible audience of learners. But how to do just that? Tools must conform to

CONTACT US

Editor Barbara Kelly

bkelly@cou.on.ca

agreed-upon technological standards, such as Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM), which is a collection of standards and specifications for web-based e-learning, or other standards-developing bodies such as the organization MedBiquitous, which creates technology standards to advance health care education.

On November 22 and 23, 2007, e-COFM and the University of Toronto's Discovery Commons – the university's new, state-of-the-art integrated technology services of the Faculty of Medicine – co-hosted the first Virtual Patient and e-Cases Symposium. National and international speakers representing virtual patient authoring tools – many that meet MedBiquitous or other standards – provided demonstrations and facilitated sessions, enabling participants to test different tools for use at their schools.

With the advent of the Canadian Health Education Commons being developed through the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada, the hope is that in the future the ability to share virtual patient e-cases will become easier when medical schools use authoring tools that meet agreed-upon standards.

Colleges and universities join ranks to increase student mobility between institutions in Ontario

As part of its ongoing commitment to improving the student learning experience and graduating the knowledge workers who will help to grow Ontario's economy, COU has joined ranks with Colleges Ontario (CO) to set up a Joint Task Force on Student Mobility and Pathways that will examine and develop recommendations in the following areas:

1. Increase options and pathways for student mobility (includes considering processes dealing with credit recognition and examining models/best practices in other areas);
2. Facilitate effective joint college-university programs and bilaterally arranged articulation arrangements (both #1 and #2 would include provincial funding incentives, new provincial structures to make student mobility easier, improved flow of information to students, or other mechanisms as identified); and
3. Review the feasibility of developing one application portal for both colleges and universities (undergraduate and graduate) and the Ontario Student Assistance Program and enhance the reporting capacity for the system.

Students should be able to move between postsecondary institutions in Ontario, but to do so requires transparent pathways within the postsecondary sector. These pathways, while providing desired mobility, must also respect the unique structure of Ontario's colleges and universities. The CO-COU Joint Task Force aims to enhance joint college-university programming and broaden access to information and application/transfer processes for students. This will entail examining best practices in other jurisdictions, especially Alberta, British Columbia and the European Union, and creating an approach that is best for Ontario.

Co-chaired by George Brown College President Anne Sado and University of Guelph President Alastair Summerlee, the Task Force is made up of Barbara Taylor, President of Canadore College; Leah Myers, President, Durham College; Tony Hanlon, President, Lambton College; Robert Turner, President, Sheridan College; Samy Mahmoud, President *pro tempore*, Carleton University; Dennis Mock, President, Nipissing University; Karen Hitchcock, Principal, Queen's University; and Sheldon Levy, President, Ryerson University.

The Task Force will produce an initial report by May 15, 2008. The report will guide the actions of each sector and subsequent discussions with government.